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Central Intelligence Agency

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Washington, D.C. 20505

## DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

3 October 1985

China's Population Control: Enforcement Troubles Persist

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## Summary

Domestic pressures have forced Beijing to adopt a more flexible birth control policy in rural areas. Although couples are still encouraged to delay child-bearing, and sanctions are still applied to families who have unauthorized children, a wider range of exceptions are being allowed for rural families to have a second child. The greater flexibility has not increased the popularity of birth control policies nor made enforcement easier, however. As local officials try to meet centrally mandated population quotas, they continue to employ coercive measures to force submission to sterilizations and abortions. Beijing decries such methods and is taking steps to eliminate them. Chinese leaders are committed to population control, however, and cannot completely eliminate abuses without sacrificing population goals. We believe international criticism of China's birth control policies has marginal effect.

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] Office of East Asian Analysis. Information available as of 3 October 1985 was used in its preparation. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Domestic Policy Branch, China Division, OEA, [redacted]

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Chinese leaders believe that if China is to modernize, the nation's growth rate must be held closely in check so that production gains are not overtaken by population growth. Beijing has worked hard to lower the population growth rate from the 1970 high of 2.6 percent to 1.4 percent in 1981. To achieve Beijing's declared goal of keeping China's year 2000 population under 1.2 billion, the population growth rate must be reduced to under 1 percent for the remainder of the century. Chinese authorities are hoping to meet this target despite the huge numbers of women who will be entering their prime child-bearing years. [redacted]

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Since the mid 1970s, China's birth control policy has been dominated by the "one child per family" dictum. Implementing this policy has been unpopular and politically costly for the regime. Although the record in urban areas and in the most developed sections of rural China has been respectable, in many areas officials have been unable to overcome the traditional predilection for large families, and for bearing sons to carry on the family line and ensure the parents' welfare in old age. [redacted]

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Recent economic reforms have complicated Beijing's population control efforts:

- The breakup of the communes, which used to administer birth control programs in rural areas, has weakened the mechanisms for controlling rural population growth.
- An increasing portion of the population is finding employment in small collective or individual enterprises, further weakening the ability of birth control agencies to enforce regulations.
- Increasing rural incomes have reduced peasant responsiveness to economic sanctions against multiple child families.
- Recent bumper harvests, and resulting grain surpluses, have weakened arguments that China cannot manage to feed more mouths. [redacted]

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Beijing has also been sensitive to non-Han discontent over population control measures, which could fuel unrest in strategically important border regions. Relaxation of birth control policies in minority areas, however, contributes to the resentment the average Chinese feels over these measures. [redacted]

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[redacted]

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### Relaxing The "One Child Per Family" Policy

These pressures have forced Beijing to make a tactical retreat from the "one child per family" goal, while still maintaining overall population control objectives. Since 1982, the number of rural Chinese families officially permitted to have second children has increased. [redacted]

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A variety of conditions can now qualify a rural couple for a second child, including remarriage, handicapped first child, minority status, and parents who themselves have no siblings. In some areas couples are routinely given permission to "try again" if their first child is a girl. [redacted]

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Authorities are anxious to maintain overall population control, however. Families in urban areas are still held to a one child limit with few exceptions. Couples wishing second children are still supposed to apply and wait for permission. Authorities continue to encourage single-child families, and sanctions still are applied to couples who have unauthorized children. [redacted]

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### Policy Implementation

Beijing's approved methods for achieving population control are a combination of propaganda, group pressure, and economic rewards and sanctions to encourage couples to use contraception or submit to sterilization. Voluntary abortions are considered a "remedial" measure. According to Chinese family planning officials, internal documents have indicated that late-term abortions or forced abortions and sterilizations are not approved population control measures. [redacted]

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Local authorities are under considerable pressure to achieve population control quotas, however, and the centrally approved methods are time consuming, frustrating, and not always effective. Cadre know that their own careers can suffer if population growth quotas are not met. Although Chinese officials have claimed that serious offenses can result in dismissal, they have admitted that cases of criminal prosecution are rare. As a consequence, many cadre adopt coercive measures. Some cadre respond to multiple pregnancies with harsh economic sanctions, and in some extreme cases individuals have been threatened with destruction of their homes if they refused to submit to sterilization. When questioned by a State Department official one rural cadre noted that anyone who has an unauthorized second child "must of course be sterilized." [redacted] when an area has been identified as exceeding birth quotas, birth control teams move in to examine women and perform abortions, insert IUDs, or carry out sterilization procedures on a wide scale. [redacted]

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The regime has admitted that abuses in enforcement of the policy have occurred. A People's Daily editorial of July 1985 criticized "crude methods" employed by some cadre, whom the paper accused of coercion and "commandism." Beijing claims that such abuses occur overwhelmingly in remote, backward areas where cadre are less well educated. [redacted]

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We believe this judgment is basically correct. In general, both compliance by the populace and reasonable enforcement of the regulations by officials are at a peak in cities, and diminish as one moves further from urban centers. Abuses do take place in wealthier rural areas as well, however. In the cities abuses are rare for several reasons: the better educated residents are more likely to accept the necessity of the population policy, there is less economic incentive for a city dweller to have a large family, and legal sanctions against violators--job demotion, loss of subsidies and favored educational treatment for the child, assignment to poorer housing--are more effective than in the countryside. [redacted]

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The difficulties encountered by the central authorities in implementing the policy demonstrate basic problems of the regime--mechanisms for control of local level implementation and for fine tuning of policies are nearly nonexistent, and policy objectives are often contradictory. In order to reduce abuses, Beijing has granted local officials increased flexibility to meet population growth targets. For example, localities are now assigned multiple year population quotas instead of yearly quotas. One family planning official recently suggested to US embassy officers that China is considering adopting a national family planning law which would specifically cover birth control practices. The only way family planning abuses could be completely eliminated, however, would be to reduce central pressure to meet population control targets, which we believe Beijing is unwilling to do. [redacted]

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### International Pressures: How Effective?

Although we believe domestic pressures are behind the easing of the "one child per family" policy, Beijing is sensitive to international concerns about its birth control efforts. Chinese leaders are resentful of foreign criticism of what they regard as a necessary internal policy, and one which they have undertaken at considerable political cost. Foreign press coverage of birth control abuses also highlights Beijing's failures in implementing policy, and draws attention to "backward" or "feudal" aspects of Chinese society, which the leadership finds embarrassing. China's response to international criticism has been to publicize positive aspects of the policy, and to point out vigorously that abuses in enforcement are illegal under Chinese law. Although Chinese leaders try to put the best face on their efforts for foreign consumption, we believe that international criticism and pressure have little real effect on Chinese birth control efforts. Foreign technical assistance, administered primarily through the United Nations, has helped the regime establish family planning centers and supply contraceptive devices to the population. [redacted]

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### A Note On Evidence

The information that is available on the population program is fragmentary. [redacted]

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[redacted] Many of the horror stories that have surfaced in the media come from the Chinese press and were published as examples and warnings to overzealous cadre. The bottom line is that we cannot accurately judge

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how common the abuses are. The massive scale and unpopularity of the birth control program in rural areas create pressures for local "commandism" that Beijing cannot fully contain.

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